

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Walter Swennen
At My Own Risk.
Couldn't Be Better.

515 West 24th Street, New York
September 18–October 17, 2015
Opening September 17, 6–8 pm

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to announce *At My Own Risk. Couldn't Be Better.*, an exhibition of new work by Belgian artist Walter Swennen. This will be Swennen's first American exhibition in over twenty years. The exhibition will feature Swennen's humorous and incisive brightly hued paintings that move between representation and abstraction. Language, legibility, subjectivity and symbolic meaning are explored and challenged in Swennen's uncompromising works, which are at once lighthearted and deeply resonant.

Before focusing on painting in the 1980s, Swennen first pursued poetry and philosophy. An abiding interest in the associative qualities of language is evident in his painting as inscriptions and suggestive linguistic experimentation populates his canvases and informs his titles. Swennen employs multiple languages simultaneously, offering a collage of repurposed and layered meanings.

In several paintings the artist asserts a nuanced but decidedly individualistic message: a piece titled *Max Says* (2015) reads *My Disinclination Remains Free* in scratchy uneven red letters, inviting curiosity and interest in Swennen's relationship to German philosopher Max Stirner, whose anti-authoritarian critique of nineteenth century Prussian society is cited here. In *Ghost Dance* (2015) we see muted pink and blue translucent washes of paint with a bold red element from American currency painted over the image of a ghost. Is Swennen leading us to consider the Ghost Dance of Native American religions and the American capitalist legacy? The artist's paintings resist conclusive reading, enticing the viewer with familiarity but allowing much to remain unknown.

In combination with the uses of language, Swennen's visual vocabulary is populated with everyday imagery of wine bottles, common fish, pigs, and other characters drawn from pop culture sources and made anonymous. What is important to the artist and endures over his thirty-year career is the question of randomness – Swennen makes clear that nothing is premeditated. The artist discovers images from the world, from visual culture, and recontextualizes symbols, words, and all the associative qualities they carry.

Walter Swennen was born in 1946 in Brussels, where he presently lives and works. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at international institutions including Culturgest Lisbon; Kunstverein Freiburg; MUKHA Antwerp; Kunsthal Rotterdam WIELS Contemporary Art Centre. Swennen has also been included in notable group exhibitions including: *Atopolis*, Manège de Sury, Mons (2015); *The Importance of Being...*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2015); *Idiolect*, Arentshuis, Bruges (2009); *La Belgique Visionnaire/Visionair België* curated by Harald Szeemann (Palais des Beaux-Arts/Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels, 2005); *Voir en Peinture* (FRAC Ile de France/Le Plateau, Paris, 2003); *La Consolation* (Centre d'Art National Contemporain, Le Magasin, Grenoble, 1999) and *Trouble Spot. Painting* (Antwerp, 1999). In November, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf will hold a solo exhibition of Swennen's work.

Kathryn Andrews

Trinity and Powers: In Search of Breadfruit
12 Rue du Grand Cerf, Brussels
Through October 9, 2015

For further information, please contact Ariel Hudes - (212) 206-9300 or ahudes@gladstonegallery.com

New York gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm

Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 6pm and Saturday, 12pm – 6pm